



WCES 2012

Rethinking geography in Romanian schools: curricular changes in geography learning in post-socialist Romania

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Abstract

Once with the fall of the totalitarian regime from Romania, in 1989, this country has recorded many changes in the social and economic life. One of the most dynamic fields has been represented by the educational system that encountered many turns both in the structural and functional perspective. Of these ones, a particular topic currently finds many intense debates in Romania concerning the quality learning in schools. It is about the curriculum that allows many opportunities for a proper instruction in connection with the contemporary requirements of the communities regardless of the scale we refer on (local, regional or national). Considering the geography, more than a descriptive science as well as an important field in human training, this paper tries to analyze the dynamics of the geographical curriculum focusing on two separate sections: the first one is assuming by the *imposed national curriculum* and the second one is oriented to the *school decision curriculum (as optional subjects)*. These curricular dimensions are open outcomes of the Romanian reform on educational system and reveal quantitative and qualitative changes in teaching and learning geography after two decades of post-socialism. In order to find some accurate results this paper is basing on a particular methodological flow. It is designing on quantitative and qualitative methods as well as on the personal experience of the author regarding the Romanian geographical curriculum. In this regard, the sat problems of this paper occur from the following questions: *Which are the most important changes in the Romanian geographic curriculum after 1990? Is the geographic curriculum really adjusting to the European standards of education? Which is the real impact of the geographical curriculum on the Romanian communities? Is efficient this curriculum in quality learning of geography?* The findings of this study show contradictory and conflicting aspects that invite for further open researches, debates and discussions. These last ones are able to provide some fair conclusions, in order to offer new possibilities of action to capitalize the strengths of the Romanian curricular reform and, of course, to cancel the negative features of it.

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Keywords: *geographical curriculum, educational reform, quality learning, geography, post-socialist Romania*

1. Introduction: motivation and the purpose of the study

During the last two post-socialist decades, Romania has encountered many changes in its own educational system. These all ones were generating by the all reforms that aimed and still aiming the adjustment of the Romanian society to the European requirements of development. In this regard, the post-socialist education had to be completely restructuring and connected with the new trends of evolution of Romania. Changes were been made

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both in the structural and functional educational system but of these ones, the curriculum assumes the most important role in the quality learning of the students. In this general background, the geography, as a study subject was not spearing. As teacher of geography for ten years (1998-2008) in the Romanian pre-university system of education and, further, as academic member on Department of Geography of the West University from Timișoara (Romania), my attention and my research interest are focused on the dynamics of the geographical curriculum, both in the primary and secondary educational levels of instruction as well as in the higher educational system. Referring to the first type, based on the exhaustive literature review but moreover on the own practice with the students we can state that the geographical curriculum has behaved many positive and negative changes with direct outcomes in the quality learning of geography. Therefore, this study tries to illustrate the main post-socialist curricular mutations in order to reveal both the goals and the threats of the study of geography, in terms of the quality of learning related to the international requirements through the lens of the current globalization of the world. Aiming to emphasize a set of proper recommendations for further steps of the Romanian educational reform, this study, firstly, analyze in a comparative approach (before and after 1990), the dynamics of the geographical curriculum. Secondly, the attention is paying to the novelties aspects of the geography in the Romanian schools that in time, as a proper feedback, were able to generate a new curricular vision that rethought the geographical contents as well as the geography learning in terms of the quality and efficiency of the student's instruction. Thirdly, as a short case study, the research is extended at the level of a particular curricular segment for a better understanding of the real manners in which the geography was rethought in the Romanian schools. It is about the optional geographical subjects, a real gain for the student's instruction in terms of the participatory learning which definitely excludes the excessive theorizing, promoting the instruction based on real understanding, skills, abilities and competences. Of this mentioned perspectives, we can remark the complexity of the curriculum, fact intensely assumed by the specialized literature both in Romania and in the international references. However, beyond this complexity, the study of the educational curriculum is important in order to provide new real perspectives concerning the quality of learning, both in general instruction of the students and in the development process of their personalities through the lens of the geographical contents.

2. A brief literature review: connection between curriculum and instructional design

As we already stated, the educational curriculum and default the geographical one illustrate a large complexity both for the all actors involved in the educational activities as well as for the researchers from different scientific fields. The complexity of the curriculum is revealed in a metaphoric way by Baskan and Özcan (2011: 4005) the authors considering the curriculum as „a valley in that it is often controversial” and, at the same time, as a „hilltop”, giving us a view of a everything around it. From this perspectives results the complexity of the educational curriculum as well as the idea that it „has the highest influential power on education which is the most significant factor for a society in protecting the culture and getting stronger in education” (Baskan & Özcan, 2011: 4011). Moreover, the cited authors consider that the study of the curriculum is recommending for understand the main trends and the particular patterns in education whatever could be the scale of analysis of it. In this regard, but aiming the quality learning and the high degree of the educational performance, Salimi & Ghonoodi (2011:3060) argue that „curriculum is made up of elements which their appropriate coordination would guarantee the success of a curriculum”. In this regard, the current approach focused on the Romanian curricular changes in the field of geography seems to be welcomed. Based on a functional curriculum connected to the actual requirements of the society the responsible actors of a nation have the possibility to compose an instructional design meant to promote, in terms of real sustainability, the quality of learning related to the calls of the contemporary societies as well as of the labour market requests. Consequently, we welcome the expressed idea by Morrison et al (2007:2), the authors considering that „the goal of the instructional design is to make learning more efficient and effective and less difficult.” Therefore, the curriculum represents the real basis in ensuring the quality in education in terms of the educated people in connection with the contemporary requirements of the society.

The scientific approaches on the curriculum as well as on the geographical curriculum are multiple, both in the international specialized literature and in Romania. From the last category we can mention Romanian researchers with latter works as Stan et al (2003), Dulamă, Roșcovan (2007), Giurgea (2006, 2007), Dulamă (2009, 2010), Ilinca (2002), Jucu (2008), Jucu, Gheorghită (2010), Mândruț (2010) and so on. On the approaches of the cited Romanian authors, but not limited to their relevant works, is based the bibliographic study of this current research. It is only a classic and quantitative method used in this analysis focused on the dynamics of the Romanian

geographical curriculum. It generates the theoretical framework in order to emphasize the main curricular changes from post-socialist Romania in the field of teaching and learning geography.

3. The methodological flow of the research

As the previous chapter shows, the current study is based, both on the quantitative and qualitative methods. The bibliographic research and the open practices with students in terms of teaching activities in schools represent the starting point in this work. The first scientific approach is grounding on the analysis of a great variety of written documents as follows: scientific books and articles, handbooks of geography, curricular guidebooks, official curricular documents and scholar programs and legislative documents (laws, ministerial orders and additional documents). This approach was completing by the experience exchange with scientists, teachers and decisional actors within the Romanian educational system occasioned by the organization of many international conferences, workshops, scientific meetings and symposia. These scientific events have had the opportunity to launch many constructive ideas concerning the quality of instruction through the lens of the Romanian curricular foresights. The open practice in schools conducted for ten years provided the contact with the direct actors involved in learning processes. So, the students, the parents of them, the teachers, the school managers all together provides apposite information regarding the main changes in the Romanian curricular framework as well as in the geographical curricula, in terms of teaching and learning of this discipline.

Moreover, these were the proper circumstances that favored the insertion of the qualitative methods as follows: survey method, cross-examination, questionnaires application and questionnaires surveys (recommended in geographical research by McLafferty, 2007), structured or semi-structured interviews (recommended in geographical research by Longhurst, 2007) and participant observation suggested in geographical literature by Laurier, 2007). This methodological complex was using in this study in order to collect relevant data concerning the practice of the post-socialist curriculum in the schools of Romania, and especially of the geographical curriculum. In the study of this last separate curricular segment, using the survey method represents a proper manner to investigate the educational curriculum (Bilgin et al, 2011). Through the intersection of these methods, this study tries to provide correct results and fair interpretations regarding the main curricular changes from the geographical field which have rethought both the content of this discipline as well as its own teaching and learning processes.

4. A global perspective on the communist geographical curriculum

For understanding the new trends of the evolution of the post-socialist geographic curriculum as well as its particular dynamics, in order to provide the quality learning after 1990, a global retrospective insight on the communist geographical curriculum is certainly mandatory. The learning of geography on the former communist regime was pretty static and descriptive without seeking the formative dimension, the behavioral development and the personality growth of the students. It rather was a theoretic learning based on the quantitative perspective assumed by the fact that was well if the students knew much. The logical thinking of the students, the creative dimension of them and the cross connection between the geographical contents and other subjects were pretty less promoted. At that time counted only the exhaustive knowledge of the geographical contents designed on cycles and levels of study. According to the curricular documents from the communist period, the geographical contents are presenting below. In the first year of gymnasium within the basic geography, the students have studied some theoretical geographic concepts: the Earth as a cosmic planet, elements from the local horizon, some basic notions regarding the natural environment (relief, climate, waters, vegetation, flora and soils). The second year of study and the third one were focusing on Regional geography. Therefore, the curriculum included the study of the continents of the world. The second year of gymnasium were designed to the study of Europe and Asia for the coming year to be studied America and Africa all after the same classic algorithm - a general reference of the continents, the geographical location, the relief, climate, water, vegetation, flora, soils, population, human settlements and economy (agriculture, industry, transportation, tourism and international commerce).

The same pattern was used in the study of the states of the world. Raising the level of resolution concerning the approaches in the regional geography, the last gymnasium year was dedicated to the study of the Geography of Romania through the lens of themes as the geographical location of the country, the relief, climate, waters, vegetation, flora and soils, the population and human settlements and the economy of Romania (agriculture,

industry, transportations, tourism and international commerce). All the contents were approached in a descriptive manner favoring only the quantitative learning. The learning was based on an excessive theorization without aiming a real instruction focused on competences, skills and activities centered on student. This instructional framework was applying in the high school. The first year of study of this second cycle of the Romanian pre-university educational system renewed in a more complex manner but in the same descriptive approach the contents of General Geography. The study was advancing but the same quantitative dimension of learning prevailed. From the contents we can remark: the Earth as a cosmic planet, elements of cartography, the lithosphere dynamics and relief of the planet, elements of climatology and meteorology, the oceans and continental waters, vegetation and fauna and, finally, soils. The second year of lyceum has comprised contents from the field of Economic Geography and the Geography of population. The learning started with the political map of the world, followed by issues in Human Geography as well as in the Geography of human settlements (urban and rural settlements). The major part of the contents were focused on the Economic Geography divided in particular sections concerning the natural resources of the planet, the agriculture of the world, the industry, transportations and tourism. The last but one year of the lyceum has been designed for the study of the environment. In this regard, the contents included notions about the theoretical approach of the natural environment (the conceptualization and typology of it), knowledge about the relations between the components of the natural environment, aspects concerning the impact of human activities in the natural environment and the main themes of the environment conservation. Finally, in the last year of the lyceum the students have studied once more the Geography of Romania pretty in the same approach as they already studied it in the last year of gymnasium. The contents are fairly similar: the geographical position of Romania, the relief (studied in a regional approach focused on the analysis of the Romanian territorial units), the climate, the waters from Romania, the vegetation, fauna and soils, the population and economy (structured in separately parts as agriculture, industry, transportations, tourism and commerce).

The global perspective on the studied geographical contents in the schools from communist Romania reveals some particular findings: at that time was practiced a quantitative learning based on a plethoric theorization; the study of geography was obtuse and repetitious especially in the case of the Geography of Romania from the last year of each cycle of study; the learning was not focused on the real competences and the practical perspective of the instruction was fairly limited; the geographical contents shows many reversals of some ordinary topics; the instruction followed simple algorithms which not allowed the development of the students creativity or of their own conduct in relation with the dynamics of the world in terms of geographical approach. The communism censored many important study themes as well as particular learning methods. At that time the Romanian geographical curriculum needed some real changes. They had to come during the first part of the post-socialist period, once with the first reforms in the field of Romanian education. The main shifts of the geographical curriculum in terms of contents as well as of the new methodological approaches are revealed in the following section.

5. New post-socialist curricular changes after 1990 - a rethought geography in the Romanian schools

The educational reforms from Romania were complex, difficult and long-standing. All these attributes occurs from the reality that the communist education had to be adjusted to the new post-socialist conditions in terms of ranging the Romanian society to those ones specific for developed European countries. Substantial changes were made of course in the geographical contents once with the new curriculum was designed. In order to provide the quality learning, the contents were accompanying by new request, foresights, regulation, methods and strategies. The main changes in terms of contents were made in all the levels and cycles of education, these ones (according to M. E. N., 1999), being presented below. For the first year of study from gymnasium by the side of some inherited contents as the Earth as planet (the world in we live), the relief of the world, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere, the soils, we can mention some new contents as issues of human settlements, the resources of the world and economic activities. This new contents related to the previous ones are able to provide a better understanding of the children concerning the complex connections between the natural features and the anthropic ones. In this case, if the factitive learning is promoted we cannot ignore the overloading of this discipline while the time resources for study decrease from two ours per week to one our. Concerning the second and the third year of study, the Regional Geography in terms of study the continents and states remains valid with important changes. All the second year of study is dedicating to the learning of Europe as direct outcome of the Romania's integration in the European political structures. From this perspective, detailed study of this continent is motivated. If in this case we can remark an ease

of the program, regarding the next stage of gymnasium we observe a real congestion of the contents because of the study of all the other continents (Asia, America, Africa, Australia). The study of the countries and regions follows both classical methods and algorithms and new approaches in terms of the work with blank maps, exercises, practical applications that tend to reduce the excessive theorization. Although the program recommends the selective study of the regions, the curriculum for this part of gymnasium is overloaded. The study of geography from gymnasium ends with the study of the Geography of Romania as it was designing during the communist period but with new approaches. Contents as the geographical location of Romania, the relief from Romania, the Romanian geographical territorial units, the climate, waters, vegetation, fauna and soils, the population and human settlements and the economic activities are boarding in terms of new didactic practices from new practical perspectives. The learning is based on particular methods as, for instance, the use of the blank maps, practical applications, exercises, essays, a large variety of different items (correlation, comparative analysis, structural synthesis and so on). The inherited but updated contents are completed with new relevant topics as the Romania within the international organizations, Romania within global economy, the major problems of the environment in Romania, the analysis of the Romanian environment, the prevent of the environmental degradation, natural risks in Romania etc). Novelty features appear also within the curriculum for lyceum. In this regard, in the first year of this cycle, within the General Geography, traditional contents were completing with new topics as well as with new approaches. Therefore, in the study of the relief, atmosphere, waters and life on Earth, grounded on the deductive boarded, the curricular recommendations are focusing on the complex study of the local horizon, it being analyzing through particular case studies. In addition, the students have the opportunity to study the relation between environment and local sustainable development and of course between environment and society.

The second level of lyceum starts in the study of Human and Economic Geography with issues in Political Geography being approached problems that were censoring during the communist regime. The study continues with problems from the Geography of population and human settlements, in the last category being included new themes as urbanization, urban dynamics, urban and rural landscapes, urban planning and urban design. The section dedicated to Economic Geography comprises issues on natural resources, agriculture, industry and tertiarization all being boarding through particular case studies. Finally, the last section is dedicating to the main economic and politic organizations of the world, a case study being focusing on the European Union. The third level is oriented on the study of the Geography of environment through the lens of the current problems of the contemporary world. Traditional contents concerning the natural environment were completing with new ones as well as with new learning methods. In this regard we can mention globalization, sustainable development, territorial planning, issues in Political Geography (themes of study censored before 1990). Moreover, appears new themes as regionalization and globalization, the economic and political system and problems on Social and Cultural geography. The problems are quite complex concerning this last geographical field, its evolution in Romanian curricula opening real perspective for further separate research. This idea is argued by the fact that during the first part of the post-socialist period the Cultural geography has been rejected by some academic schools for though the year of 2000 to be included in many scholar programs. The worth of introduction of the Cultural geography in Romania is assuming by Dr. Voiculescu Sorina, assistant professor at Department of Geography from the West University of Timișoara.² Of course we must recognize that these geographical subjects have been also prohibited before 1990 by the old totalitarian regime from Romania. A completely new way was being recently adopting in the study of the Geography of Romania. From traditional themes to a modern and actual approach, the study of Romania is making through the lens of this country as a part of the European Union. The contents are designing by the instrumentality of the close connection between Romania, Europe and European Union. The list of the main contents are as follows: Europe and Romania – basic concepts, the natural environment of Europe and Romania, problems of Human geography in Europe and Romania, environment and landscapes in Europe and Romania, the study of some regions from Europe and Romania, Romania and European Union (the genesis of European Union), Romania as a part of European Union, Europe and European Union in the contemporary world, problems of Social and Cultural geography in Europe and Romania, tertiary sector in Romania and Europe.

² See, for instance, Voiculescu Sorina, Cretan, R., (2005), *Geografie culturală. Teme, evoluții și perspective* (Cultural geography. Themes, evolutions and perspectives), Timișoara: Eurostampa Publishing House, Romania.

We can observe major changes in the curriculum of the last level from lyceum as well as the importance of some topics concerned Europe and European Union and the social and cultural approaches on the European territorial systems. A brief comparative analysis of the presented contents (as a fundamental part of the Romanian curriculum) reveals the major changes made during the post-socialist period as direct outcomes of the numerous reforms in education. Nevertheless, changes were also making in the others segments of the curriculum. Is the case of the vision of learning, of the methodological approaches of the contents and of the instruction based on competences. All these ones aim a quality learning ensured by the practical dimension of education. So, we can assist in the contemporary period to a modern and functional curriculum „presented in terms of competences” (Psifidou, 2009: 2439), as it is designed in many others development countries from the world. The competences in Romania are new, the educational curriculum being previous conceived in objectives, these ones being also very important in the insurance of the quality in education. The relevance of them is argued by Morrison et al (2007:16), the authors considering that „the objectives provide a map for designing the instruction and for developing the means to assess learn performance.” Concluding, we can state that in Romania during the last two decays the geographical curriculum was almost entirely rethought but the instruction is far to be a perfect practice. With all the changes within the curricular contents and with all transfer from the quantitative instruction to the learning focused on objectives and further on competences the Romanian curriculum, as well as the Romanian curricular practices still encountered many problems that must be solving in the next future. It is about the incoherence of the legislative framework that generates too many changes in short periods of time, the decreasing of the resources of time allocated to the study of geography, the quality of human resources, the motivation in learning, the instability of the educational system and so on. Finally, we can talk about a rethought geography in Romanian schools but, at the same time, by a geography which requests corrections and improvements in order to promote the real understanding of the world in which the students live.

6. Geographical optional subjects: a gain for the national, regional and local curriculum

A real gain for the post-socialist Romanian curriculum and of course for geography as a study discipline was assuming by the optional curriculum. According to the Education Ministry Order No. 4150/13 of July 1998 regarding the National Curriculum from Romania as well as to the Education Ministry Order No. 4224/22 of July 1998 (as a reference legislative documents of the old law on education; for more details see Giurgea, 2006, 2007) and according to the new law in education from 2011, the national curriculum requests the optional subjects. The optional subjects are required these being separate disciplines with a particular didactic design in order to accomplish the preference of the students in learning some topical subjects. Consequently, the students have the opportunity to study themes related to their own interests. This reality is a main goal for the field of geography because in the Romanian scholar landscape the optional subject with geographic profile encountered a real success these all ones being welcomed by the students and, of course, by the teachers. This curricular segment promoted and it still promotes the creative learning and the instruction based on motivation and practice competences. The analysis of the optional subjects with geographic profile is very complex (see, for instance, Giurgea, 2006, 2007, Jucu, 2008), but summarily we can remark three types of disciplines. The first one is connecting to the particular geographic content derived from the main discipline as separate themes (*Hydrology, Biogeography, Geomorphology, Geography of settlements, Geography of population, Economic Geography* and so on at the level of General Geography). The second category is designed by subjects at the scale of the curricular area - that connect Geography, History and Civic Culture; is the case of some subjects as, for instance, *Urban Geography, Cultural Geography, Capital Cities, The history of the geographical discoveries, Famous travels* etc. The third group of subjects includes multidisciplinary geographical subjects connecting contents and didactic methods from different disciplines from various curricular areas from the national curriculum. In this last set could be designed geographical optional subjects as *Global changes of the world, Gender Geography, The geography of Arts, Astronomy, Cultural studies, The integrated study of a geographical region, Territorial systems, Urban Dynamics* etc. Tabel 1 shows a part of these optional subjects but the list is much larger. The titles and the contents of the optional subjects depend by the all actors involved in the process of education from school. Is the case of the students which express their options, teachers which make the offers to the all interested ones and design the program of the optional subjects and school managers which promote, through the lens of the curricular deregulation, the own identity of the scholar unit at local and regional level). The optional subjects can be applied

from the proposals of the central command center (in our case the Ministry of Education) or can be designed by the teacher himself with the approval of the regional scholar inspectorates. However, once accepted by the decisional actors, the optional subject become mandatory for all students which previous expressed their interest on it. Often the geographical optional subjects are very attractive for all the persons involved in the process of the student's instruction. This attribute as well as the large interest of them identified by qualitative methods are illustrating by figure 1. It shows the increasing trends of the interest of the students, teachers, parents and school's managers. Also, the figure illustrates the success of these optional subjects within the scholar institutions.

Tabel 1: Types and examples of geographical optional subjects as proposals in Romanian schools

optional at the core of geography - simple geographical subject	optional at the scale of the curricular area – interdisciplinary optional	optional at the level of many curricular areas – multidisciplinary optional
<i>Geomorphology</i>	<i>Urban Geography</i>	<i>The Geography of Arts</i>
<i>Biogeography</i>	<i>Cultural Geography</i>	<i>Astronomy</i>
<i>Hydrology</i>	<i>The capital cities of the world</i>	<i>Geographical Informational Systems</i>
<i>The geography of human settlements</i>	<i>Tourism Geography</i>	<i>Global changes in the world</i>
<i>The geography of a country or region</i>	<i>The Geography of European Union</i>	<i>Gender Geography</i>
<i>The geography of the local horizon</i>	<i>Geography of Environment</i>	<i>Cultural studies</i>
<i>Economic Geography</i>	<i>The history of geographical discoveries</i>	<i>Territorial Systems</i>
<i>The geography of transports</i>	<i>Cartography</i>	<i>The city and the world globalization</i>

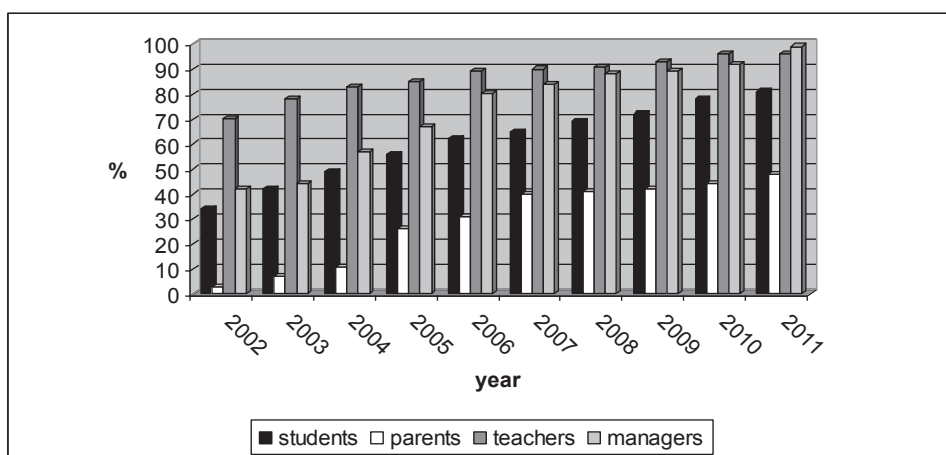


Fig. 1: The graphical modelling of the increased interest of the educational actors towards the geographical optional subjects between 2002 and 2011 (Source of data: cross-examination; applied questionnaires, processed data).

Together with the focused subjects on particular topics from geography, an important role in the quality of learning of the geographical realities is assuming by the cross-curricular optional disciplines. This approach emphasizes the real instruction requesting a good informing and training by the teachers because otherwise they could encounter problems concerning implementation of the cross-curricular teaching (Taş, 2011). The promotion of the cross-curricular learning is suggested also by Seçkin and Gözütok (2010:260), the authors considering that this approach in instruction has „an integrating effect on the students to understand the world and gain life skills.” However all the optional geographic subjects in terms of new optional curriculum known also as the curriculum of the schools decision represent a real gain for the Romanian educational system and a goal for the current instruction of the students from the schools of this country.

7. Findings and results

The current analysis reveals the main changes of the Romanian geographical curriculum in terms of contents, didactic methods and the types of geographical subjects (from the imposed ones to the optional disciplines). In this regard, we can observe both positive and negative shifts within the Romanian geographic curriculum. It is adjusted to the European requirements but it is far to be entirely functional, revealing here and there structural and functional disruptions which must be corrected and neutralized through the further decisions on Romanian educational system as part of a reform which now is not completed. The curricular politics is partially adjusting to the realities of the local communities, but this demand can be accomplishing by the promotion of the increasing level of decentralization and deregulation. The geographical curriculum is partially productive in learning processes, a brake in its efficiency being the unequal report between contents and the resources of time allocated for instruction. From the positive attributes of the curricular reform we can mention: the strong dynamics of the curricular contents as well as of the didactic methods in the teaching and learning of geography, the attractiveness of learning supports, the better interconnection between the geographical contents, the transfer from the excessive theorization to a practical formative and creative learning, the assignment to the competences, the cross-curricular approach of the geographic realities, the presence of the optional curriculum (the curriculum of the school's decision) which promotes, both decentralization in education as well as the assertion of the school's identity in the local community, the attractiveness of the optional geographic subjects, the appearance of some new geographic subjects, the presence of a quality learning that develops the creativity and the formative skills of the students, the cross-curricular instruction, a positive feed-back of learning in terms of the scholar results of the students and so on.

From the negative outcomes we outlined the preservation in some cases of a quantitative learning, some topics strong theorized, the presence of the incoherence and disruptions between contents, the overloaded programs in addition with the resources of allocated time, the recurrence of some contents which need some new and modern approaches, the multiple changes within the curricular reform, the conservatism of some actors involved in the instructional processes etc. These findings are able to make us to draw some conclusions and recommendations in order to inspire further decisions regarding the continuous promotion of the quality learning of geography in Romanian schools.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

The educational reform(s) in Romania has been complex and long standing and now it is not completed. In some cases, the assumed decision concerning the progress of the instruction has been controversial and dilemmatic generating disruptions, both in the structural and functional terms. The reform aimed the all features of the educational system, the curriculum being a separate part of it. In this regard, the geographical curriculum was no exception directly influenced by the new politics on education. Integrated this last perspective within curricular requests, we can observe that the political dynamics of Romania is strongly reflected by the curricular contents. On the other hand, these last ones comprise many themes thereupon before 1990 no one could ever think.

The integration of new themes of study was not easy, from this perspective appearing difficulties in teaching and learning geography. Nowadays we assist at a rethought geography in terms of themes of study as well as in terms of new ways in approaching the territorial realities. But the curricular changes, frequently don't take into account neither particular reality from the scholar institutions, neither the progress of the geography as a science in understanding the dynamics of the themes of study as well as the new methodological design in the new trends of learning.

Therefore, we recommend that further actions of the reform in education to be grounding both on the particular scientific studies focused on the peculiarities of the didactic and pedagogic characteristics of schools, on the most recent scientific works and on some new research concerning themes that are subjects of study for students. The dynamics of the geographical curriculum is positive, but it is not absolving by some functional and structural disruptions, contrasts, breaks and defaults. All these ones should be correcting in the next future. The geography have been not rethought only in terms of the themes of study, the changes being oriented to the new decentralized curriculum that favour the appearance of the optional subjects with geographic profile. They are a real gain for the Romanian contemporary society, promoting the quality learning and the formative instruction in close connection with the social specific of the local communities.

The geography as a field of study has been rethought it is still rethought and it will be further rethought and redesigned, in order to provide new tolls and perspectives in insurance the quality learning in schools. Therefore, the

new trends of the curriculum design must be real and in line with the real success of the students during the learning activities. In this regard, the Romanian responsible actors with the educational reform have to follow, both internal and external models that can inspire further decision. Of course, a real source could be the advanced societies of the world. That is why we end this current study with the suggestion made by *Ohio State Department of Education* (2001) cited by Rahimi et al (2011:2072); according to it, the curriculum mapping in terms of the new curricular design can represent „the main strategy to improve student's educational performance.”

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